

06. Luke 3:23 - 4:13



The third portrait Luke 3:23 - 4:13 (Mark 1:12-13)

Luke prefaces the third portrait with a genealogy (3:23-38), the purpose of which is to present Jesus as being part of our human history. He traces Jesus' family tree back to [Adam](#), thus highlighting the fact that he belongs to the whole human race (Matthew's genealogy starts with Abraham).

Genealogy Matthew 1:2-17

Abraham

Tamar
Rahab
Ruth

[1 Chronicles 1:34; 2:1-5, 9-15]

David

Bathsheba

(Solomon)

[1 Chronicles 3:10-16]

Zerubbabel

[1 Chronicles 3:17-24]

Joseph - Mary

Jesus

Genealogy Luke 3:23-38

ADAM

[1 Chronicles 1:1-4,24]

Abraham

David

(Nathan)

Zerubbabel

Joseph - Mary

(‘as was thought’)

Jesus

In his third portrait Luke establishes the fact that Jesus, although truly God's Son, is also one of us, experiencing humanity as we experience it. Jesus was flesh like us: he suffered and was tested. The wonder of his life was that, unlike us, he did not sin but remained perfectly open and responsive to God.

Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect ... Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested' (Hebrews 2:17-18).

'We have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15).



Luke 4:1-2

(Mark 1:12-13)

‘Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted (tested) by the devil.’

I will now allure Israel, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her’ (Hosea 2:14).

The key message for us in this passage is that Jesus’ mission was to defeat evil in all its manifestations, by the power of the Spirit of love that graced him so beautifully at his baptism.

This conflict and Jesus’ victory is a theme which permeates the whole of Luke’s gospel.

Luke dramatises the testing of Jesus by drawing on catechetical material that had been developed within the Christian community as a result of reflection on the classical temptations of Israel in the wilderness.

1. Israel tempted by hunger to go back to Egypt (Exodus 16).
2. Worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32).
3. In their thirst the people failed to trust God (Exodus 17).

A precedent for this can be found in the Book of Deuteronomy, which Luke quotes at the conclusion of each of the trials.

In Deuteronomy we are told:

‘Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart’ (8:2).

Having passed through the waters (3:21-22), just like his ancestors, Jesus is tested, like them, in the wilderness. In this testing we find what is ‘in his heart.’

First test : Luke 4:2-4 : Jesus the prophet (Matthew 4:2-4)

Jesus ate nothing at all during those days,
and when they were over, he was hungry.

The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'

Jesus answered him, It is written,
'One does not live by bread alone.'

'The Lord, your God, humbled you by letting you hunger,
then by feeding you with manna ...

in order to make you understand

that one **does not live by bread alone**, but by every word
that comes from the mouth of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The great sin is the sin of relying on ourselves without reference to the source of our life. Dependence on God is not a substitute for responsible action. It is going to the source of love so that all our actions will indeed be inspired and empowered by God's Spirit. There is no other way to enjoy our heart's desire or to really contribute to the joy of others.

Jeremiah saw this when he gave expression to God's complaint:

My people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns that can hold no water' (Jeremiah 2:13).

It is from his many experiences of deprivation, when all he could do was remain trusting in God and obedient to the Spirit that guided him — experiences dramatised here in the first trial — that Jesus could say:

‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat ... Strive for the Father’s kingdom and these things will be given you as well ... Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Luke 12:22,31,34).

We see from his overcoming of the first trial that his heart is with his Father. He needs 'bread', he needs sustenance, but he knows that his greatest need is for love, and this love is received as a gift, with empty hands, from the one to whom we pray:

'Give us each day our daily bread' (Luke 11:3).

Second test : Luke 4:5-8 : Jesus the king (Matthew 4:8-10)

‘Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’

Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

Jesus, the ‘**more powerful**’ one promised by John, refuses to serve evil or to receive anything except from the hands of God. Jesus wants to win the world, but he will do so only with love and only in reliance on his Father.

Jesus’ humanity flows from his divinity. His divinity is his intimate human communion with God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-13

‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart ...

When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you – a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant – and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve**, and by his name alone you shall swear.’

The story of the golden calf demonstrates the failure of the people to heed God's warning:

They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' (Exodus 32:8).



Third test : Luke 4:9-12 : Jesus the priest (Matthew 4:5-7,11)

Luke 4:9-11

Then the devil took him to **Jerusalem**, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’

Psalm 91

‘You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust’. ... he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge ... For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. ... Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.’

Having been fed with the manna, the Israelites presumed they had a right to expect from God whatever they wanted. They demanded that God prove that he cared for them by meeting all their needs. Experiencing thirst, they demanded water, failing to trust that he, the source of living water, would care for them. God did care for them.

As Paul says: ‘What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?’ (Romans 3:3).

In a dramatic gesture Moses strikes the rock, symbol for God, and water gushes forth for the people to drink (Exodus 17:6).

The people, however, sinned in failing to trust: ‘He called the place Massah (‘trial’) and Meribah (‘contention’), because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ (Exodus 17:7).

The authors of Deuteronomy concluded: ‘**Do not put the Lord your God to the test**, as you tested him at Massah’ (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Luke 4:12

Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’

It is not without reason that the final clash with evil occurs in Jerusalem. Luke is preparing us for the victory which Jesus will win on the cross. After this victory won in the desert, Luke presents Jesus' public ministry as victoriously challenging the powers of darkness and establishing God's reign on earth. He does not let us overlook the humanity that Jesus shares with us. It will be startlingly manifest when the 'opportune time' comes, when 'Satan enters into Judas'(22:3), and the 'power of darkness' has its hour (22:53).

Luke 4:13

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.